Ludwig and Eloise.

LUDWIG AND ELOISE.

Once upon a time there were two youths named Herman and Ludwig; and they both loved Eloise, the daughter of the old burgomaster. Now, the old burgomaster was very rich, and having no child but Eloise, he was anxious that she should be well married and settled in life. "For," said he, "death is likely to come to me at any time: I am old and feeble, and I want to see my child sheltered by another's love before I am done with earth forever."

Eloise was much beloved by all the youth in the village, and there was not one who would not gladly have taken her to wife; but none loved her so much as did Herman and Ludwig. Nor did Eloise care for any but Herman and Ludwig, and she loved Herman. The burgomaster said: "Choose whom you will—I care not! So long as he be honest I will have him for a son and thank Heaven for him."

So Eloise chose Herman, and all said she chose wisely; for Herman was young and handsome, and by his valor had won distinction in the army, and had thrice been complimented by the general. So when the brave young captain led Eloise to the altar there was great rejoicing in the village. The beaux, forgetting their disappointments, and the maidens, seeing the cause of all their jealousy removed, made merry together; and it was said that never had there been in the history of the province an event so joyous as was the wedding of Herman and Eloise.

But in all the Village there was one aching heart. Ludwig, the young musician, saw with quiet despair the maiden he loved go to the altar with another. He had known Eloise from childhood, and he could not say when his love of her began, it was so very long ago; but now he knew his heart was consumed by a hopeless passion. Once, at a village festival, he had begun to speak to her of his love; but Eloise had placed her hand kindly upon his lips and told him to say no further, for they had always been and always would be brother and sister. So Ludwig never spoke his love after that, and Eloise and he were as brother and sister; but the love of her grew always within him, and he had no thought but of her.

And now, when Eloise and Herman were wed, Ludwig feigned that he had received a message from a rich relative in a distant part of the kingdom bidding him come thither, and Ludwig went from the village and was seen there no more.

When the burgomaster died all his possessions went to Herman and Eloise; and they were accounted the richest folk in the province, and so good and charitable were they that they were beloved by all. Meanwhile Herman had risen to greatness in the army, for by his valorous exploits he had become a general, and he was much endeared to the king. And Eloise and Herman lived in a great castle in the midst of a beautiful park, and the people came and paid them reverence there.

And no one in all these years spoke of Ludwig. No one thought of him. Ludwig was forgotten. And so the years went by.

It came to pass, however, that from a far-distant province there spread the fame of a musician so great that the king sent for him to visit the court. No one knew the musician's name nor whence he came, for he lived alone and would never speak of himself; but his music was so tender and beautiful that it was called heart-music, and he himself was called the Master. He was old and bowed with infirmities, but his music was always of youth and love; it touched every heart with its simplicity and pathos, and all wondered how this old and broken man could create so much of tenderness and sweetness on these themes.

But when the king sent for the Master to come to court the Master returned him answer: "No, I am old and feeble. To leave my home would weary me unto death. Let me die here as I have lived these long years, weaving my music for hearts that need my solace."

Then the people wondered. But the king was not angry; in pity he sent the Master a purse of gold, and bade him come or not come, as he willed. Such honor had never before been shown any subject in the kingdom, and all the people were dumb with amazement. But the Master gave the purse of gold to the poor of the village wherein he lived.

In those days Herman died, full of honors and years, and there was a great lamentation in the land, for Herman was beloved by all. And Eloise wept unceasingly and would not be comforted.

On the seventh day after Herman had been buried there came to the castle in the park an aged and bowed man who carried in his white and trembling hands a violin. His kindly face was deeply wrinkled, and a venerable beard swept

down upon his breast. He was weary and footsore, but he heeded not the words of pity bestowed on him by all who beheld him tottering on his way. He knocked boldly at the castle gate, and demanded to be brought into the presence of Eloise.

And Eloise said: "Bid him enter; perchance his music will comfort my breaking heart."

Then, when the old man had come into her presence, behold! he was the Master,—ay, the Master whose fame was in every land, whose heart-music was on every tongue.

"If thou art indeed the Master," said Eloise, "let thy music be balm to my chastened spirit."

The Master said: "Ay, Eloise, I will comfort thee in thy sorrow, and thy heart shall be stayed, and a great joy will come to thee."

Then the Master drew his bow across the strings, and lo! forthwith there arose such harmonies as Eloise had never heard before. Gently, persuasively, they stole upon her senses and filled her soul with an ecstasy of peace.

"Is it Herman that speaks to me?" cried Eloise. "It is his voice I hear, and it speaks to me of love. With thy heart-music, O Master, all the sweetness of his life comes back to comfort me!"

The Master did not pause; as he played, it seemed as if each tender word and caress of Herman's life was stealing back on music's pinions to soothe the wounds that death had made.

"It is the song of our love-life," murmured Eloise. "How full of memories it is—what tenderness and harmony—and, oh! what peace it brings! But tell me, Master, what means this minor chord,—this undertone of sadness and of pathos that flows like a deep, unfathomable current throughout it all, and wailing, weaves itself about thy theme of love and happiness with its weird and subtile influences?"

Then the Master said: "It is that shade of sorrow and sacrifice, O Eloise, that ever makes the picture of love more glorious. An undertone of pathos has been *my* part in all these years to symmetrize the love of Herman and Eloise. The song of thy love is beautiful, and who shall say it is not beautified by the sad undertone of Ludwig's broken heart?"

"Thou art Ludwig!" cried Eloise. "Thou art Ludwig, who didst love me, and hast come to comfort me who loved thee not!"

The Master indeed was Ludwig; but when they hastened to do him homage he heard them not, for with that last and sweetest heart-song his head sank upon his breast, and he was dead.

1885.

[End of *Ludwig and Eloise* by Eugene Field]